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March 17, 1978

Dear Senator Sarbanes:

As you have previously expressed concern in the John Victor Stoen custody case, I am pleased to forward this progress report.

On February 24, the American Consul in Georgetown, Guyana met with the new Guyanese Minister of Justice, Mohamed Shahabuddeen. Minister Shahabuddeen stated that child custody cases are civil disputes and therefore there is no legal requirement that hearings be scheduled within a specific time period. Further, the Minister indicated that a judge's written opinion may take four months to compose and release. Consequently, the delay to date in the Stoen case is not considered excessive under Guyanese legal procedures.

The Department shall continue to keep you informed of progress in this case. Should you require further information, please contact our Office of Special Consular Services, telephone 632-3015.

Sincerely,

Douglas J. Bennet, Jr.
Assistant Secretary
For Congressional Relations

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The Honorable
Paul S. Sarbanes,
United States Senate.

CA:SCS:EHO'Kane:gjl:wp 3/10/78 Clearances: SCS - Ms. Powers
x29461 SCS - Mr. Dobrenchuk
SCS - Mr. Lambert
CA - Miss Watson
H - Mr. Krizek